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Employability Issues in Nepal: Graduates' Perceptions, Aspirations and Experiences

Shatrughan Prasad Gupta

Associate Prof: Kathmandu Shiksha Campus

Ph. D Scholar, Graduate School of Education, TU

Email: yespgupta@gmail.com

Abstract

The perception, career aspirations and experience of Master of Education (M. Ed.) graduates have been examined in relation to employability issues in this study. The research has addressed perception in relation to the curriculum provided to M. Ed. students, drawing on the Human Capital Theory put forward by Becker (1964) and Yorke (2006). Adopting a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire from conveniently sampled respondents while qualitative data were generated through focus group discussion with 30 graduates (18 females, 12 male) from Kathmandu Shiksha Campus (KSC) and semi-structured interview was also held with six purposively selected students. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically with a focus on employability related issues. The findings show that the M.Ed. programme under Tribhuvan University performs well in research training and academic relevance with 53.3% positive responses. However, the data indicate serious limitations in teaching practice, professional skill development, mentorship and most critically responsiveness to the job market demands with 96.7% of respondents. Although participants perceived the pedagogy as relevant to the academic sector, they reported a mismatch between their career aspirations, the skills required during the programme and the requirements of academia and the broader job market. Furthermore, inconsistencies have been identified between TU-prescribed curriculum and Teacher Service Commission requirements. The curriculum was perceived as overly theoretical and insufficiently aligned with contemporary workforce demands. Overall, the findings suggest an urgent need to strengthen the employability orientation of the M.Ed. Programme to meet graduates' aspirations and institutional requirements. This study points out some notable gaps in the existing curriculum and provides a basis for further research to enhance the employability of M.Ed. graduates in Nepal.

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Introduction

Employability issues in Nepal and global market is one of the major concerns considered in the academic market. The contemporary research on employability in higher education (HE) has gathered immense criticism and poses a critical issue in light of the questions: What does employability mean? What are the status and the issues of employability in Nepal particularly in M. Ed program? What are the aspirations of M. Ed graduates under Tribhuvan University (TU) and how they perceive it? What is the contemporary understanding about employability in Nepal? What types of problems they have encountered in job market while going for the search of job? How has the higher education been linked to their programs and prepared their graduates for job market? How does one develop employability? How is employability measured or assessed? What is lost when employability becomes the primary focus in higher education? What is the market demands? What are the gaps in M. Ed curriculum? What skills are now most important as employers evaluate M. Ed graduates beyond formal academic credentials in the contemporary global academic market? How has globalization, internationalization, and competitiveness changed employer's expectations moving employability from degrees and certificates to particular skills?

Amongst others, these questions demonstrate the broad areas of positions adoptable in relating to employability in higher education. In contemporary society, there is an extraordinary focus on employability in higher education. In fact, employability continues to develop an argument on an ongoing debate across centuries on the career and developmental aspects of higher education, with particular emphasis on higher education graduates' ability to contribute to and be productive within the contemporary context of the massification of higher education institutions (HEIs) across this globe. In effect, instead of being an end (the creation of well-rounded individuals), higher education is positioned a new as simply a means to an end (valued work) (Tight, 2023).

Nepal's higher education has undergone significant transformation since the restoration of democracy in 1990 A.D. The adaptation of a multi-university model led to a massification of higher education and resulted unplanned growth to establish higher education institutions. Different community based HEIs have been established in between 2035 to 2050 B.S. throughout the country without mapping. Few of them were established with political influence. Currently, Nepal has 28 universities (14 central, 6 provincials and 8 deemed) along with 1,432 constituents and affiliated colleges and 59 private colleges affiliated with foreign universities (UGC, 2081, MOE, 2081). While this expansion has

widened access to higher education, it has also raised serious concerns about the quality, relevance, financial sustainability and graduates' employability.

Many universities continue to grant affiliations without comprehensive need assessments or proper geographical mapping or job market analysis resulting in low enrolment, high operational deficits and limited institutional effectiveness (Gupta & Shibakoti, 2024). As per UGC (2024), more than 500 HEIs have less than 100 students showing the critical sustainability problems for existence. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the University Grants Commission are forcing to merge HEIs due to the lack of the students. However, the current affiliation records (2081) of Rajshree Janak University, Janakpur and Far Western University affiliation related decisions have shown the adverse picture.

These universities had affiliated even to schools, tuition centers and paper based private companies as well as many colleges having dual affiliations without proper justification, need analysis and mappings. No organizations including UGC controlled, monitored, and terminated grants in the name of university autonomy and universities. Such affiliations trends are not matched with merger policy of UGC which indicates the urgent needs for systematic reform in higher education to ensure sustainability, quality, relevance and employability. This raised the new dialogues in uncontrolled growth of universities and colleges in Nepal. So, here seems the necessity of universities and higher education institutions governing act which is under the discussions for the decades.

Universities are increasingly expected to increase graduates' employability by equipping them with competences, skills and attributes valued by employers (Menon et al., 2018). Globally, employability has become a core concern of higher education curricula (Sumanasiri et al., 2015). However, studies' findings consistently demonstrate a mismatch between graduates' educational preparation and job market requirements (Allen & De Weert, 2007 as cited in Menon et al., 2018). In Nepal, this mismatch seems more serious. Government employment opportunities are limited due to overstaffing while the private sector remains constrained by political instability and slow economic growth. Consequently, many graduates struggle to find suitable employment leading to rising level of under-employment and large-scale youth outmigration (e-Kantipur, 2025, September 29).

The demands of employability are further complicated by out-of-date management and education curriculum that don't address the needs of the modern workforce. The employment market requires flexible skills like digital literacy and ongoing upskilling in

a time of fast technological advancement, digital transformation, and artificial intelligence. Governments throughout the world are beginning to align higher education with more comprehensive economic development policies, emphasizing micro-credentials, flexible learning pathways, and lifelong learning. However, HEIs in Nepal have been far slower to adjust, as seen by the country's ongoing skill gaps, graduates' waning confidence, and rising ambitions for study and work abroad (KIST, 2024).

The Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) and the Employability Theory (Yorke, 2006) were the theories utilized to assess the project's importance. According to the Human Capital Theory, education is a process that raises people's economic worth, productivity, and income. The hypothesis is supported by actual data, which clearly shows that educated individuals increase a nation's GDP per capita, tax base, and general social stability (World Bank, 2018, 2019). For instance, the World Bank (2019) noted that educated individuals increased both the tax base and GDP per capita. Additionally, the results demonstrated that a nation's productivity rate and general social stability were enhanced by an educated populace (World Bank, 2018). Low human capital economies would only experience weak innovation, slow growth, and the lowest labor market productivity (Hussain, 2005). In addition to aforementioned idea, the Employability idea highlights the necessity for individuals to possess universal, personal, and useful traits in the labor market (GMMC Tracer Study, 2019; Sharma, 2014; MDC, 2021).

An appropriate case for dissection on employment issues in Nepal is Kathmandu Shiksha Campus (KSC), which is a renowned community-based teacher education colleges associated with Tribhuvan University (TU). With over 530 associated community campuses in the country, it is the biggest one in TU, a renowned name in the Faculty of Education (FoE). In a bid by KSC to train teachers, trainer teachers, and educational researchers for the educational system in Nepal, it is a vital institution (Faculty of Education, TU, 2025; Nepal Public Campus Association, 2025). Although Nepal presently possesses more schools, namely 35876 schools, over 286,000 teachers in 2023-2024 (MOF, 2023-2024), employment opportunities for freshly graduated personnel in this sector remain low, thereby resulting in foreign workers migration increased (MOF, 2023/24),

As of March 2024, for example, about 5.97 million Nepali laborers had obtained labor permits to work overseas (MOF, 2023/24). In one sense, it is a reflection of the nation's restricted options, particularly for educated young. However, it is also observed that many graduates fail in the competitive examination of teacher selection by Tribhuvan

University service commission. Even the teacher service commission exam has faced the problem of the position unfilled. Given that there are significant concerns about the quality and applicability of teacher education programs in Nepal, what are the implications? The reason why our graduates are unable to compete in the tests might possibly be the subject of another study.

In view of the situation, this particular study undertakes to investigate the concerns, attitudes, and intentions of Master of Education graduates from the Kathmandu Shiksha Campus with respect to employability over a period of ten years, ranging from 2015 to 2024. The aim of the study was to make an assessment of how apt the education provided by the Master of Education degree is to meet the ever-evolving needs of the educational scene, along with that of the general job market. For purposes of ensuring a harmonious integration with the needs of higher education, along with that of its graduates, the findings of the study would seek to guide policy decisions. Furthermore, this study would support the Sustainable Development Goal (4) with regard to emphasizing quality, relevance, and employability in higher education, along with the development of overall research in Nepal.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine employability issues, graduates' perceptions, expectations and experiences of Master of Education (M.Ed.) graduates at Kathmandu Shiksha Campus (KSC), Nepal. Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled a comprehensive understanding of graduates' perceptions, aspirations and employability experiences. The study was theoretically informed by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and Employability Theory (Yorke, 2006), which together frame employability as the outcome of both academic investment and skill development.

The study targeted M.Ed. graduates who completed their programme at KSC between 2015 and 2024. For the quantitative component, survey questionnaires administered during the tracer study and their responses were utilized for identifying the employability issues of graduates. For the qualitative component, 30 graduates from M. Ed. in English Education, Nepali Education, Health Education and Educational Planning and Management (18 females and 12 male) were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of graduates with diverse experiences including employment, further study and job seeking.

Based on the findings of the survey among the graduates, they were invited for focused group discussion. In the focused group discussion, participants shared their experiences of learning in the M.Ed. programmes finding jobs and seeking their career. Out of 30 graduates, 6 graduates were interviewed using semi-structured interview guidelines. Interview was fit for exploring their personal experiences, perceptions and the meanings individuals assign to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather rich and in-depth data allowing participants the flexibility to express their perceptions, aspirations and experiences. The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were conducted face-to-face. All the interviews and focused group discussions were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim.

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the employability issues of the graduates and their perceptions towards employability related dimensions of M.Ed. programme. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the systematic procedures of coding, categorizing, theme development and interpretations. The themes were derived both deductively, guided by theories and tracer study findings and inductively from participants' narratives. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated and discussed for the overall results and discussion.

To enhance the reliability, the questionnaire items were aligned with the theoretical framework and the tracer study indicators. Moreover, these items were reviewed by the subject experts for the content clarity and relevance. The trustworthiness of qualitative data was ensured through triangulation, prolong engagement with the participants, data and the transcripts. The clear documentation of coding procedures and thematic development further supported the analytical rigor of the study. Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were voluntary and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. While reporting qualitative data, pseudonyms were used and all the audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored in the password protected laptop and only used for research purposes.

Results and Discussion

The graduates' perceptions, aspirations and experiences of employability issues have been presented in the following themes and sub-themes. First, the graduates' perceptions on the thematic responses obtained from survey questions are summarized in table 1. And other

themes emerged from the interviews and focused group discussions are presented subsequently.

Graduates' Perceptions of Employability and Programme Effectiveness

The participants of this study perceived M.Ed. programme as academically rigorous but weakly aligned with employability demands. While curriculum relevance and research training were acknowledged, limited practice-oriented pedagogy, professional skill development, mentorship, digital preparedness and labor market alignment reduced confidence in job readiness. Overall neutrality in satisfaction reflects unmet potential and the need for stronger employability-focused reform. Their responses are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. *Employability issues in Nepal: Graduates' responses in 14 variables*

Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Missing
Academic Quality & Curriculum Relevance	5 (16.7%)	6 (20.%)	3 (10.%)	12 (40.%)	4 (13.3%)	0
Teaching-Learning Pedagogy	4 (14.3%)	2 (7.1%)	16 (57.1%)	4 (14.3%)	2 (7.1%)	2
Research Capacity & Thesis Experience	1 (3.4%)	8 (27.6%)	9 (31.0%)	11 (37.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1
Professional Skill Development	5 (20.0%)	9 (36.%)	4 (16.%)	6 (24.%)	1 (4.%)	5
Faculty Competence & Mentorship	8 (26.7%)	7 (23.3%)	14 (46.7%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0.%)	0
Institutional Resources & Learning Environment	3 (12.%)	12 (48.%)	4 (16.%)	5 (20.%)	1 (4.%)	5
Career Readiness & Employability	4 (13.3%)	7 (23.3%)	5 (16.7%)	13 (43.3%)	1 (3.3%)	0
Higher Academic Aspirations	11 (36.7%)	14 (46.7%)	3 (10.%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (3.3%)	0
Social Contribution & Educational Leadership	8 (27.6%)	11 (37.9%)	7 (24.1%)	3 (10.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1
Overall Program Satisfaction & Future Expectations	5 (17.2%)	4 (13.8%)	11 (37.9%)	5 (17.2%)	4 (13.8%)	1
Alignment with School Job Market Demands	4 (13.3%)	6 (20.0%)	10 (33.3%)	4 (13.3%)	6 (20.0%)	0
Preparation for Employability in Academic Institutions	4 (13.3%)	7 (23.3%)	6 (20.0%)	9 (30.0%)	4 (13.3%)	0
Linkage between the TU syllabus & Service Commission Curricula	0 (0.0%)	2 (7.1%)	13 (46.4%)	4 (14.3%)	9 (32.1%)	2
Responsiveness to Evolving Educational Job Needs	14 (46.7%)	15 (50.0%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0

The survey of 30 M.Ed. graduates at KSC under FOE reveals a mixed perception of employability which is characterized by relatively strong academic preparation but weak alignment with job market demands. Half of the respondents agreed that the curriculum meets Nepal's educational difficulties, indicating that graduates recognized the academic quality and curriculum relevance of M.Ed. program. However, there appears to be a significant disconnect between theoretical rigor and practical human resource preparation, since academic capabilities did not convert into confidence in employability. Perceptions

of teaching-learning methodology had an inverse relationship to employability; most replies expressed neutrality, and only a tiny percentage reported favorable experiences. These findings indicate a limited application of practice-led and participatory learning strategies. Participatory learning strategies enable the development of skills for employability such as communication, critical thinking, and flexibility. On the other hand, their capacity for research was considered an improvement through thesis writing classes. The curriculum did not make a significant impact upon their leadership skills, communication skills, and creative thinking, as stated by a majority of respondents, who evaluated the development of their professional skills relatively poorly. Considering their employability skills, this finding appears most significant. Likewise, an evaluation of the competence of the faculty and mentorship was also mainly negative. This assumes an absence of professional networking, mentorship for careers, and academic counseling that helps improve the employability of graduates.

The issues were further compounded by dissatisfaction with institutional resources and the learning environment, particularly library and ICT facilities. The insufficient infrastructures appear to limit the opportunities for developing digital and technological competences that are central to present educational employment contexts. Likewise, graduates expressed cautious optimism regarding general career readiness, with nearly half perceiving some level of preparation for employment in education sector. However, this optimism is weak when respondents considered specific job market alignment. Perceptions of programme alignment with school job demands and employability in academic institutions were mixed. They reflected partial preparedness rather than systematic workforce orientation. The awareness of the demand of M.Ed. graduates and the linkage between the TU syllabus and Teacher Service Commission requirements was also limited.

The results indicate that weak coherence between policy/programme and employment as argued in the literature (Allen & De Weert, 2007). The most critical employability issue relates to the M.Ed. program's responsiveness to emerging educational job requirements such as digital literacy, inclusiveness and pedagogical competencies. All most all the respondents disagreed that the curriculum addresses these areas. They perceived the programme as outdated in relation to current and future employment trends. This indicates the low confidence level of graduates in the competitive job market. Low level of aspiration for higher education study and perceived capacity for social and educational leadership also reinforce the limited impact of M.Ed. programme on long term career motivation and professional identity formation. The graduates' overall satisfaction

remained largely neutral which reflects neither strong endorsement nor outright rejection. This shows that graduates have sense of unfulfilled potential.

In summary, the data displayed in the table 1 shows the perceptions of graduates on M.Ed. programmes in relation to employability which shows serious lacking in professional skill development, mentorship, resource adequacy and alignment with education job market. This study suggests that curriculum revision, faculty development, curriculum-job market linkages and improved institutional resources are essential for the enhancement of employability of graduates.

Graduates' Perceptions of Skills Development and Employability

The data obtained from the recent tracer study conducted by KSC shows that M.Ed. graduates have enhanced various skills from the academic programmes. However, the analysis shows that these skills are less relatable to the employability in the respective field of study. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data shows that whatever skills the graduates earned from their academic programme in M.Ed. are not enough to be employed.

Table 2. Skills enhanced from the curriculum/syllabus

S.N.	Descriptions of Skills	Female (n=18)	Male (n=12)	Missing
1	Skills	12 (66.7%)	8 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)
2	Communication Skills	14 (77.8%)	9 (75.0%)	7 (23.3%)
3	Critical Thinking	11 (61.1%)	6 (50.0%)	13 (43.3%)
4	Problem-Solving	9 (50.0%)	4 (33.3%)	17 (56.7%)
5	Technical Skills	5 (27.8%)	7 (58.3%)	18 (60.0%)
6	Digital Literacy	4 (22.2%)	5 (41.7%)	21 (70.0%)
7	Teamwork	11 (61.1%)	4 (33.3%)	15 (50.0%)
8	Leadership	9 (50.0%)	3 (25.0%)	18 (60.0%)
9	Adaptability	11 (61.1%)	4 (33.3%)	15 (50.0%)
10	Creativity	12 (66.7%)	6 (50.0%)	12 (40.0%)
11	Time Management	11 (61.1%)	4 (33.3%)	15 (50.0%)
12	Analytical Skills	14 (77.8%)	9 (75.0%)	7 (23.3%)
13	Research Skills	9 (50.0%)	8 (66.7%)	13 (43.3%)
14	Interpersonal Skills	10 (55.6%)	8 (66.7%)	12 (40.0%)
15	Decision-Making	7 (38.9%)	9 (75.0%)	14 (46.7%)
16	Entrepreneurial Skills	12 (66.7%)	5 (41.7%)	13 (43.3%)
17	Ethical Awareness	11 (61.1%)	8 (66.7%)	11 (36.7%)

The data presented in the table above shows graduates' self-reported perceptions of skills enhanced through M.Ed. curriculum particularly at KSC. This provides the important information about how programmes contribute to the employability. The findings suggest

that the programme is perceived to strengthen academic and cognitive skills more effectively than technical, digital and market-oriented competencies reflecting a partial and uneven development of employability related human capital. Graduates reported strong gains in communication and analytical skills (over 75% across genders). This suggests effective development of core cognitive human capita essential for academic and educational roles.

The findings reveal that the programs significantly strengthened key academic and professional competencies among graduates, particularly in communication skills (77.8% females; 75.0 % males) and analytical skills (77.8 % females; 75.0 % males).

These high percentages show that the curriculum helps to develop skills and competencies needed for employment as well as for pursuing higher studies. In the same way, the high percentage of creativity (66.7%), entrepreneurship skills (66.7%), and ethical awareness (61.1%) among girls indicate the focus of the organization towards innovation, entrepreneurship and ethics. However, there exist some skills like digital literacy (22.2 % female; 41.7 % male) and technical skills (27.8 % female; 58.3 % male), where the performance is less, indicating a difference in gender and hence an overall requirement for more technological inputs in education.

The moderate level of development in leadership skills, problem-solving skills, and project management skills implies that although KSC offers sound theoretical knowledge, more practical and industry-engaged education is required. All these indicate that the aspirations of the emerging breed of students who find employment in the competitive and technological sectors. For the overall higher education system in Nepal, this assessment identifies an overall need to modernize the education curriculum and adopt more technological inputs and engagements. It is necessary to emphasize more on practical/industry-oriented education and entrepreneurship initiatives. This would improve the employability of students and also contribute positively for nation building.

Common Aspirations among Graduates of HEIs

This KSC tracer research (2015–2024) reveals graduates' common aspirations, which include landing a steady employment with room for professional growth and a position that aligns with their own beliefs, such as sustainability and social impact. Access to learning opportunities, flexibility in work schedules, freedom to travel, competitive benefits in the form of just remuneration, a productive workplace culture, and assistance for entrepreneurs wishing to launch their own businesses. This research provides a highly significant commentary on the Nepali job/employment market in addition to these other

trends/aspirations. It highlights some extremely important concerns, such as the entry-level employment market in Nepal.

It has become worse over the past 10 years, and the majority of graduates now feel unprepared for the workforce and have difficulty obtaining jobs in their fields of expertise. Similar to KSC, the majority of other job/tracer studies (BNC, 2024; GCI, 2024; PUSoB, 2024; SMC, 2023) show that fewer than one-third of graduates find employment that fits their credentials in the first year following graduation. These results point to the urgent need for curriculum modifications that are relevant to the labor market, as well as an increase in experiential learning and employer participation throughout Nepal's HEIs. In all regions of Nepal, employers often find inconsistencies between the skills of recent graduates of higher education and the demands of the contemporary workplace.

Digital competences, job-related practical competencies, and the skillful application of AI are only a few of the areas. The results of recent surveys and studies (KSC, 2024; BNC, 2024; GCI, 2024; PUSoB, 2024; SMC, 2023) also highlight the critical need to update and modify HEI curricula to incorporate digital competencies and experiential, applied learning opportunities in order to better prepare graduates for the demands of the modern workplace. Nepalese graduates' expectations for the future are becoming more and more centered on meaningful employment, a great workplace culture, diversity, and corporate assistance for their overall well-being. Tracer studies indicate that graduates select some companies over others mostly due to factors such as employment security, corporate culture, rewards, and prospects for professional growth. This pattern is indicative of a larger generational focus on mental health and purpose-driven employment. Geographical flexibility and mixed employment arrangements are becoming more and more important to many Nepalese graduates. Smaller companies and start-ups are becoming more appealing possibilities for certain graduates, but factors including workforce location, life balance, and competitive wage systems are impacting their career choices (KSC, 2024).

Graduates' Experiences of Employability

The participants in the focused group discussion expressed their experiences of being employed through rigorous studies again. Their expression shows that the study of the academic courses could not help them obtain job. One of the participants of FGD said:

After completion of my Master's degree in Education, I applied for the secondary level teaching license and appeared in the exam. It was my bad luck that I failed the exam in the first attempt. Again, I joined the preparation class and spent more

than six months' time in the institute. Then, I passed that license exam and also the teacher service commission in the same year. (Narayan, M.Ed. graduate at KSC).

Similarly, another participant shared:

The courses we studied in the campus are heavy and we studied them just to pass the exam. We never realized their practical implication while studying. I don't know what is wrong with our curriculum or courses in the campus. This study does not support us to get the job easily. (Smriti, M.Ed. Graduate at KSC).

On the other hand, next participant said:

I am working at the private school. As soon as I passed M. Ed., I was given the classes at Secondary Level. There, I learned many practical things while working. The courses taught in the campus were theoretical and not directly linked to the practice. (Shiva, Graduate at KSC).

These expressions show a consistent perception among graduates that employability outcomes were achieved largely outside the formal M.Ed. curriculum rather than through it. Narayan's experience of repeatedly preparing for the teaching license and Teacher Service Commission Examinations highlight a disconnection between curricular learning and certification requirements. This suggests that institutional human capital formation was insufficient for direct job market entry. Employability, in this case, depended on additional private preparation and personal investment beyond the university programme. Smriti further added the curriculum as exam oriented and heavily theoretical, with limited perceived practical relevance. It was evident that learning was largely framed as a means of passing assessments rather than developing occupational competence indicating weak integration of employability-oriented pedagogy.

This reflects a failure to translate academic knowledge into professional capital which is a key concern in graduate employability framework (Becker, 1964). In contrast, practical skills and professional confidence were reported to develop primarily through workplace exposure particularly in private schools. Shiva perceived employment itself as the site where employability skills such as classroom management, instructional strategies and professional adaptation were acquired rather than during university study. This reinforces the view that the M.Ed. programme contributes more to credential attainment than to work-readiness.

Collectively these narratives suggest that while the M.Ed. degree functions as an entry qualification, graduates experience a significant gap between academic preparation and employability demands. The findings highlight the need for stronger alignment between curriculum, professional certification systems and workplace realities to support smoother transitions from graduation to employment.

Conclusion

The thematic analysis of interviews and questionnaire with 30 graduates (2015–2024) reveals a complex picture of graduates' perceptions, aspirations and experiences of employability and Master's degree courses in Nepalese higher education system. While 60 % of respondents appreciated strong subject knowledge and theoretical foundations, 40 % reported deficiencies in practical application, digital literacy and industry-relevant skills. Approximately 65 % pursued careers outside their academic disciplines driven by financial necessity, personal interest or better employment prospects. Graduates emphasized the importance of generic skills, such as communication, adaptability, teamwork and emotional intelligence with over 70 % identifying these as critical to employability. Self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy were also cited as pivotal in securing job offers and navigating early career challenges. Despite these strengths, graduates noted significant gaps in curriculum relevance, career support and experiential learning. Existing career services were underutilized, often generic and not integrated into the academic journey. Exposure to internships, volunteering and leadership opportunities positively influenced employability, highlighting the need for structured platforms for real-world engagement and reflective learning.

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